

Bruce Weber right choice, achieves major success in first season



When it was announced that Bruce Weber would be the next coach at K-State, many, including myself, were a little puzzled. I was interning with the Charlotte Bobcats, sitting on the couch, and my first reaction was to ask, "why did the Wildcats hire Weber?"

After all, this was a guy that had missed the NCAA tournament in three of his final five seasons as the coach of the Illinois Fighting Illini. His final season saw the Fighting Illini start out 13-3, only to lose 12 out of their next 14 games to miss postseason play all together. He had not been able to keep the top talented high school players in state, with players like Derrick Rose, Anthony Davis and K-State's own Jacob Pullen going to different schools and having outstanding college careers. It was for these two reasons that I thought that K-State had made the wrong

decision in hiring in Weber, and now I am here to say that I was wrong. The number one difference that I have noticed from this season compared to last is just the team's overall attitude. Players like Shane Southwell, Thomas Gipson and Angel Rodriguez have added newfound confidence to their game, especially Southwell. This season, Southwell has averaged 8.3 points per game, (10.3 in Big 12 play) and has the second-highest 3-point percentage in Big 12 play, at 44 percent. In his early career he was a 25 percent shooter, and only

hit nine from deep in his first two seasons. A player does not just become a great shooter like that overnight, and a lot of the credit has to go to coach Weber's ability to instill the confidence in his team to just go out and play basketball. Also, a big part of the success is the team's development on the offensive end. Under coach Frank Martin, the Wildcats did their best work on the offensive end by attacking the glass. While the team's offensive rebounding has not been as strong this season, the offense has continued to develop, allowing the best shooters to get

open shots. Under Weber, the Wildcats have more spacing on the perimeter, which has helped in the emergence of sophomore point guard Rodriguez. He is second in the Big 12 with an assist-to-turnover ratio of 2.30. His ability to get into the lane has helped the other Wildcat players to get the wide-open shots that they have hit this season. As the team enters the Big 12 Championship and NCAA tournaments in the next two weeks, the Wildcats are playing as well as anybody in the country, and have a great chance to make

March even more memorable for their fans. As I said before, I was not sure about coach Weber, and we will never know how good this team would have been under former coach Martin or any other coach for that matter. However, with the way the team is playing and with their positive attitude, it looks like Athletics Director John Currie and the people that made the decision to hire Weber made the right choice.

Mark Kern is a senior in print journalism. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com

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Low: 35 °F



TIPOFF

Big 12 Championship Quarterfinals:
Thursday, 6.p.m. @ Sprint Center

Wildcats' regular season ends with Big 12 Conference title



Emily DeShazer | Collegian

Senior guard **Martavious Irving** looks at the basket during the loss at Oklahoma State on Saturday. The Wildcats had a bittersweet night, losing the game but still winning a share of the Big 12 title.

After Frank Martin left the K-State men's basketball program, uncertainty for the program's future came pouring in from nearly every direction. Acting rather quickly, K-State Athletics Director John Currie hired recently fired Bruce Weber, turning the uncertainty into excessive amounts of skepticism. April 1, 2012, may have felt

like doomsday to some of the K-State fan base, but the tie with Kansas for this year's Big 12 Championship makes the skepticism nothing more than a piece of history. Weber brought in a motion offense that has met if not exceeded most expectations. Multiple players put up career statistics this season, and with strong players coming back to fill next season's roster, career bests may even be beaten. Results didn't come quite as quickly at the start of the season, but, with time, Weber and his young coaching staff helped this team transition into one of the best in the conference and the nation. "Obviously, I'm elated for our players, staff and the entire

K-State nation that we were able to win a share of the Big 12 Championship," Weber said. "I know how much time our team put in to getting to this point. It's not an easy thing to do and it's not exactly the way we planned the day to go. However, to get a trophy and to get to hang a banner is special." Playing Michigan within the first month of the season provided the Wildcats with a measuring stick that could not have come at a better time, even though they suffered their first loss. A second loss at the hands of Gonzaga, a potential No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament, was

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Emily DeShazer | Collegian

Sophomore forward **Thomas Gipson** stands in the way of Oklahoma State's **Marcus Smart** on Saturday in Stillwater. Gipson was a strong contributor off the bench all season, adding 15 points in the loss to the Cowboys.

By the numbers

John Zetmeir
staff writer

1 *Kansas State finished with a tie for 1st in the Big 12*

For the first time since 1977, K-State finished the regular season tied for first place, giving them a share of the conference title. This is the first time K-State has won a Big 12 Conference championship. The Wildcats became the third team in the Big 12 to win a conference title in both football and men's basketball in the same academic year.

2 *The number of K-State's losses that came to lesser-ranked teams*

Entering March Madness, K-State has a very impressive resume. Of the Wildcats' six regular season losses, only two came to lesser-ranked teams and only one was against a team that was not ranked at all. The Wildcats' season consisted of winning the games that they were supposed

to. This is a big reason why K-State claimed a share of the Big 12 crown, and will have the No. 2 seed going into the Big 12 Championship tournament this week in Kansas City.

3 *The number of seniors in this year's class, the winningest in K-State history*

Rodney McGruder, Jordan Henriquez and Martavious Irving were part of K-State's 2009 recruiting class. The trio went to four consecutive NCAA Tournaments and became the all-time winningest senior class in school history after the home win against Texas Tech this season. Add to that a Big 12 regular season title and this senior class becomes one of the most decorated in K-State history.

14 *The number of Big 12 regular season games the Wildcats won*

In his first year at the helm, K-State's head coach Bruce Weber

often preached the importance of defending the home court in conference play, and this year's team listened to his advice. Eight of the Wildcats' 14 wins came at home, with their only home loss coming to the team that the Wildcats shared the title with, KU. It was not an easy task to add six more wins on the road, but the Wildcats got the job done. Three of K-State's six road wins came by a score of 3 points or less.

22 *Jersey number of senior Rodney McGruder*

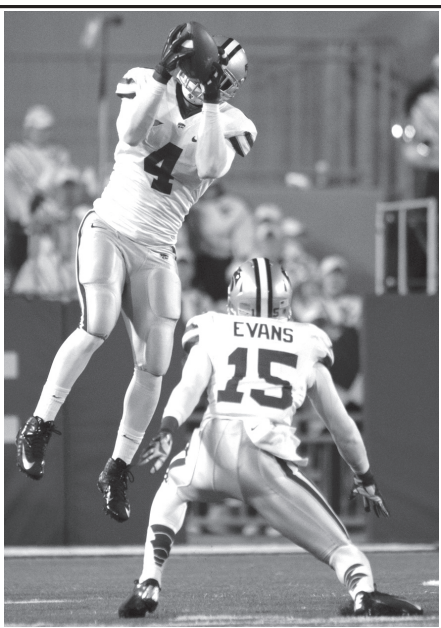
What didn't senior guard Rodney McGruder do for the Wildcats during the 2012-13 season? Leading the team in points per game and tying for first in rebounding, as well as finishing in the top 20 in the Big 12 in scoring, field goal percentage, steals and minutes played, McGruder scored 20 points or more nine times this season and the Wildcats were 7-2 in those games.

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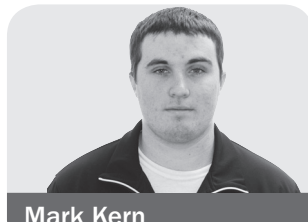


NCAA tournament berths will be decided at Big 12 Championship



Emily DeShazer | Collegian

The Wildcats yell and get ready for the night's game in Bramlage Coliseum on March 5 before facing TCU. K-State went 14-4 in Big 12 Conference play this season and will compete in the Big 12 Championship beginning at 6 p.m. on Thursday at the Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo.



Mark Kern

With the Big 12 Championship tournament starting on Wednesday, there are some important things to look for. KU, K-State and Oklahoma State are definitely in the NCAA tournament and are playing for potential seeding. Then you have teams like Iowa State and Oklahoma who are more than likely in, but can clinch a berth with a successful week. You also have Baylor, a team desperate to make the tournament. There are many storylines,

and here is a look at a few of the key ones.

1. What does Baylor have to do to make the NCAA tournament?

With the Bears knocking off KU and helping the Wildcats clinch a share of the Big 12 title, Baylor is back in the NCAA tournament discussion.

Right now, according to ESPN's Joe Lunardi, the Baylor Bears are the second team on the first four out, meaning they still have some work to do. With wins over Kentucky, Oklahoma State and KU, the Bears have had some very good victories this season.

To clinch a berth in the tournament, Baylor is going to have to beat Oklahoma State on Thursday and hope for a game against K-State

on Friday. A good showing against the Wildcats on Friday might just clinch them a berth, while a win would definitely get them into the tournament.

2. Who is the dark horse in the Big 12 Championship?

After their heartbreaking loss to KU on Feb. 25, the Iowa State Cyclones got blown out by Oklahoma in their next game, giving the impression that the team might have been in a downward spiral.

However, two wins later, including an upset over No. 13 Oklahoma State, the Cyclones are getting their swagger back.

Going for Iowa State are the team's ability to shoot 3-pointers and the fact that, besides Baylor, the Big 12 Championship means the

most to Iowa State when it comes to NCAA tournament chances.

With a potential Friday rematch looming against KU, expect Iowa State to come out hungry and give the Jayhawks all they have for the third time this season.

3. Which player means the most in helping his team make a run in the Big 12 Championship?

Just as the case was on Saturday, Pierre Jackson is the engine that makes the Baylor offense go. He was incredible against the Jayhawks, scoring 28 points, while also totaling 10 assists to go along with six rebounds.

There is no point guard in the Big 12 quicker than Jackson, and his ability to get to the hole allowed junior forward Corey Jefferson to

put up a stellar game against the Jayhawks.

With Baylor knowing that they need to make a run in the Big 12 Championship, Jackson is going to be the guy looked upon to make sure they get the job done. Look for Jackson to continue his great play and help the Bears push for a spot in the NCAA tournament.

Finals Prediction:

With final standings to judge by, KU and K-State have been the most consistent teams in the Big 12 this season, both earning a share of the Big 12 title. Even though the Jayhawks were able to get the best of the Wildcats both times the two teams played each other, K-State tied for the Big 12 title by winning the games that the Jayhawks were supposed

to win.

Both teams could potentially have some very tough matchups in the semi-finals, with KU potentially playing Iowa State or Oklahoma (a team that beat the Jayhawks once already), while K-State could face Oklahoma State or a Baylor team that has to keep winning to try and lock up an NCAA tournament berth.

In the end, the home-court advantage in Kansas City for K-State and KU will do enough to set up a Big 12 final between the two Kansas schools. It will allow both fan bases to definitely be able to brag about their schools, and should make for an electric atmosphere.

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TITLE | K-State at top of conference in team assists heading into Championship

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ugly, but again it gave the Wildcats a chance to play against one of the nation's best.

Scattered in the early portions of the non-conference schedule were games against several lower-tier opponents, and although final scores were less than satisfactory, it set the stage for a new page that began just before the holidays.

Perhaps no moment was more important for the co-conference champions

than K-State's performance against Florida just three days before Christmas. The Wildcats scored 67 points on the Gators, and held what was believed to be one of the strongest offensive teams in the country to 61 points.

As if the victory wasn't enough, the Wildcats began the conference slate by knocking off Oklahoma State at home. The legitimacy of the Wildcats was in question after their defeat of the Gators, but little doubt remained after the opening conference win. No player was expected to

play a bigger role this season than senior and recently selected All-Big 12 First Team selection, Rodney McGruder.

With arguably his best performance of the season coming in the Jan. 5 matchup against the Cowboys, where he scored 28 points total, McGruder has cemented himself into program history.

The senior guard is only the second player in K-State history to be ranked on the top 10 list for both rebounding and scoring.

Joining McGruder in the history books were fellow

seniors Jordan Henriquez and Martavious Irving. The last four senior classes have won at least 90 games, but no group has claimed more victories than the present group. At 99 victories and counting, the trio has helped move the Wildcat program to a prominent position in the national scene.

Of the six losses for the Wildcats, five came at the hands of a team that have been ranked No. 1 this season, with the last coming from Oklahoma State in Saturday's regular season finale.

K-State challenged its opponents on a nightly basis, and found a sense of consistency on the offensive end, which has been crucial.

Point guard Angel Rodriguez was a prominent fixture at the top of the conference standings in assist-to-turnover ratio this season, dishing out 159 assists to just 69 turnovers. The Wildcats as a whole were conference best in team assists, with 513 this season, and an average assist-to-turnover margin of 1.41 per game.

Sitting at 25-6 record and

a No. 2 seed in the upcoming Big 12 Conference Tournament, the Wildcats will be in prime position to win more than a share of the conference by taking home the tournament trophy.

With a chance to improve their NCAA tournament seeding, excitement continues to grow for what will very likely go down as one of the best seasons in program history.

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